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FM AMEMBASSY SANAA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6603
INFO RUCNSOM/SOMALI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0359
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
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RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000451

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/27/2012

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [SO](#) [YM](#)

SUBJECT: SOMALIA'S SHEIKH SHARIF READY FOR DIALOGUE, BUT ON HIS OWN TERMS

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES NABEEL KHOURY, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Charge met with former Somali Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) Chairman Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed on March 26, under the auspices of the Yemeni Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Sharif and former CIC foreign minister Ibrahim Adou, who joined him in the meeting, stated that the CIC had never been against talking with the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), but will not participate in the national reconciliation conference slated for April 16. Sharif and Adou called on the USG to support the call for an immediate withdrawal of the Ethiopians, agree to the participation of the CIC as an organization in any reconciliation talks, and to hold a "genuine" reconciliation conference sponsored by a neutral party in a neutral territory outside of Somalia. Charge informed the pair that flexibility and compromise were necessary for any reconciliation process, and that they needed to show some of that spirit if they wanted to contribute to peace in their country. They could communicate directly with the TFG leadership to agree on a neutral chair for the conference and on agenda items, but insisting on the withdrawal of the Ethiopians and inclusion of the CIC as an institution as pre-conditions were total non-starters. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) At the urging of the MFA, Charge and PolChief met with Sharif and Adou to assess their views of the situation in Somalia after several weeks in Yemen. Sharif began by enunciating his primary pre-condition for any reconciliation talks with the TFG -- the "immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Ethiopian troops" from Somalia. Reconciliation, he said, is impossible under occupation. Charge replied that Sharif was putting the cart before the horse. Calling for the Ethiopians' withdrawal and discussing the modalities of that withdrawal under peaceful conditions logically could be the first item on the agenda for talks with the TFG -- but not a pre-condition.

¶3. (C) Asked about his stance regarding the African Union stabilization force, Sharif said that TFG President Yusuf had de-legitimized the force in the public's mind by stating that they were coming not to create the conditions for peace, but to "extend Yusuf's authority." Sharif and Adou said they had been in "constant contact" with Ugandan President Museveni before the Ugandan contingent's deployment, in the hopes that they would come "to create stability, not contribute to instability." Unfortunately, according to Adou, the TFG is "misusing" the Ugandans and the Somali population sees them as a hostile foreign force as a result.

14. (C) Even if the issue of foreign forces in Somalia were set aside, Sharif and Adou explained, they still would not participate in the April 16 reconciliation conference. "The TFG has declared the CIC illegal, and has forced us underground," they complained, "and Yusuf does not even control Mogadishu himself, so how can we go there and prepare for the conference and do our business normally?" This will not be a "real dialogue," because Yusuf and PM Gedi have the support of the Ethiopian troops on the ground, they are the ones to select who is invited, and they are planning a massive military operation in Mogadishu in the run-up to the conference, factors that make it impossible for the CIC to prepare for and participate in the conference.

15. (C) Sharif and Adou urged that the USG help organize a "real" reconciliation conference outside of Somalia in neutral territory, hosted by a neutral party. The TFG, civil society, intellectuals, diaspora, and the CIC as an institution must all be represented for the dialogue to be successful. Charge said that if Sharif and Adou were serious about wanting to participate in a reconciliation process, they would contact the TFG directly to begin negotiating about the format of the talks. They could agree on a neutral chair, for example, and on agenda items.

16. (C) Former CIC members should not fixate on what title is beside their name at the table, Charge continued, because the important thing for any reconciliation process is not who you say you represent, but what you actually say and do to promote peace. They should stop looking at themselves as a government-in-exile, because the international community and the Somali people will not allow the CIC's return to Somalia as an institution to govern the country. Sharif and Adou

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should focus, rather, on what contributions they can make as concerned Somalis -- and take part in the political process through legal parties -- rather than dream about a return to power that will not occur.

17. (C) Adou claimed that they had shown restraint by not speaking out against the TFG in the media, while TFG leaders had taken every opportunity to denigrate former CIC leaders "in the most outrageous terms possible." Yusuf is "very focused on tribal revenge," he said, and not national reconciliation. When pressed, Sharif admitted that he had not spoken to the media since his arrival in Yemen because President Saleh had told him not to, but said he might be willing to provide an interview in order to clarify his position, if the Yemeni Government agreed. Charge said that the USG has been disappointed, in this regard, that Sharif has not thus far done or said anything to contribute to calming the situation in Somalia.

18. (C) COMMENT: FM Abu Bakr al-Qirbi and his deputy are both in Riyadh for the Arab League ministerial, so we have not had a chance to hear their assessment of Sharif. Based on our own conversation, it appears that Sharif -- and to a lesser extent Adou -- are not willing to be pragmatic and work their way back into the Somali political process by negotiating with the TFG about their role in the April 16 conference. Sharif in particular struck us as cynical and more interested in taking jabs at U.S. and TFG positions than to genuinely looking for a positive role to play.

19. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: What is clear at this point is that the Yemenis are being cautious with Sharif and Adou. Asked about media reports that Sharif had gone to Doha to meet with the former Speaker of Parliament, our MFA contact said, "We would never have let him leave Yemen." Yemeni security contacts confirm that both are under virtual house arrest, with their movements, communications, and meetings closely managed and/or monitored by the Yemeni Government.
KHOURY